

ironies, ses dérisions, ses déracinements désinvoltes : la 'voix du large' reste à jamais celle d'une femme qui lutte, sérieuse, cherchant du possible, loin de tout orgueil. L'amour l'oriente, comme la (com)passion. Et une éthique guettant sens, valeur, nécessité, mission et vocation, ontologiques. Ce que Michèle Finck nomme, dans ses *Correspondances stellaires* (79-102) cet 'au-delà de l'espace et du temps [...] du visible et de l'invisible' (99), colore et oriente tout le recueil, malgré tout ce qui semble vouloir le miner, vers 'l'émerveillement' (201), vers la 'louange' (218), vers ce 'oui central' (111) où le poème se transmue en une improbable car toujours interrogative 'ébauche : / Haleine // Du /Divin?' (196), une poésie concevablement faite de 'rudiments / De prières // Pour héler / Le divin?' (197). Comme disait Derrida parlant de l'œuvre d'Hélène Cixous, celle de Michèle Finck serait dans son cœur une *œuvre-pour*, au sens fort, finalement très fort.

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Rainaldi, Linda. *Outsider Art of Canada*. Milano: 5 Continents Editions, 2023. 191 p.

A discussion of what Jean Dubuffet termed, in the 1940's, *art brut* in his efforts to draw attention to the value and broad human and aesthetic significance of the artistic creations of largely hospitalised patients with mental disorders, and of what Roger Cardinal, in his 1972 book, called *outsider art*, marginally widening the scope of Dubuffet's thinking – such matters inform the opening chapters of this excellent and beautifully illustrated book, also available in its French version titled *L'Art brut au Canada*. It is a discussion that remains ongoing throughout the art world and has occasioned for many and perhaps especially in Canada, as Rainaldi demonstrates, a further sense of the pertinency but also the relativities and ambiguities that may attach to the interpretations of these and related terms involved. *Art brut* deals with not only painting and drawing but also written texts often accompanying or even intrinsic to plastic creation. Criteria take into account clinical madness, affective trauma, idiosyncratic behaviour, compulsivity, frequent complete lack of awareness of or utter indifference to art history, questions of autodactylicity and authenticity, though, for some cultures, and in a more recent expansion of our understanding of what 'being outside' of artistic norms might mean, factors such as loneliness, social and economic precarity, bullying, but also sudden impulse to give oneself over to largely forgotten or even long-assumed pleasures of private creativity – these and other impetuses may enter the vast arena of what now we still tend to term, in English, 'outsider art'. Folk art, for example, *art naïf* or *art singulier*, as may be said in Québec. But, for many, including so very many artists who have been placed in categories of any provenance, such terminology and pigeon-holing remains utterly irrelevant to their activity, its purpose, its deep and infinitely varying personal meaning, if even such could be articulated. Linda Rainaldi is clever and sensitive with respect to such tensions and complexities and they remain in many ways at the core of her work which has the great merit of determining that to approach a given artist requires an opening of the mind not merely to abstraction, valuable as it may be in a broad way, but to the specificities, the uniquenesses at play in the individual paintings or other creations of a given artist, as well as the sense each artist may have and perhaps be able to articulate of his or her own *poïein*, doing and making. These opening chapters of Rainaldi's study, it should be emphasised, constantly root themselves in the concrete if often enigmatic evidence of given works, here not necessarily Canadian, though the art of the Nova Scotian John Devlin features prominently with its highly idiosyncratic yet visionary and mathematised modes ranging from the fine drawings of his *Nova Cantabrigiensis* project emerging from an emotional breakdown while studying in Cambridge, to his current exquisite collaging with gold and

silver leaf informed still by a private mathematics which the back of many works such as *Limen eternum* may offer.

To accomplish her task, Rainaldi begins her adventure of discovery and meditation in British Columbia, ultimately crossing the vast expanses of the land to the maritime provinces, though not forgetting the North with its Inuit communities and traditions. And to begin in British Columbia is straightaway to come face to face with the ancient indigenous creative activities of its various peoples. While such art may attract attention, it is set aside here given, firstly that it has rarely been deemed art as such by those who practice it, and secondly due to what practitioners, its makers and doers, regard as the irrelevance of categories strictly western and arguably even recolonialising in nature. But outsider artists are aplenty in the province. Take for instance Laurie Marshall, a 'doodler', painting without brushes from fifty on until a sudden impulse to abandon a yet passionate ritual offering *naïf* images of landscape and animals or a self-portrait revealing a fragility or a perhaps even carefree sense of being. Or there is Kevin House, whose outsidership is equally tricky to ascribe, far from commercialism, creating for his own pure satisfaction, searching for 'his soul' through 'meditation and intuition' though without any manifest psychological disarray. The 20-year *Babel Project* of Ian McKay with its many ink and watercolor portrayals of towers or curious figures, is nicely discussed, the artist, largely blind, playing with factors of the utopian, the fantastical, the infinite without perspective. Not unlike these artists, Pandora, as he prefers to call himself, may or may not have been collected by Dubuffet, his acrylics centred rationally-emotionally, though through dreams and gestures felt essential to his mental health, upon the poor and disenfranchised of our society whose pains and naked vulnerabilities are reflected in his commonly untitled distortions and blotchy or blank figures.

After a brief discussion of the special place of folk art in Canadian culture and then skipping over what we might presume is an Alberta devoid of any pertinent 'outsider' creativity, Linda Rainaldi's analysis comes to land in the Canadian prairies and particularly Saskatchewan, where William McCargar's untitled sunset's bold and unpretentious simplicities reveal authenticities of a different yet related significance to those demanded by Dubuffet of artists distinctly working beyond rationality, observed externality, enclosed as they so often were by asylum walls disallowing the 'commonplace' and plunged thereby into the idiosyncratic, the intensely secret and obscure realms of the psyche. Levine Flexhaug, for example, a speed painter of fine technique, self-taught and caught in the Depression, though becoming relatively famous through the touring exhibition and marketing of his skills, seems to fall clearly outside the categories of Dubuffet, Prinzhorn and Cardinal, and yet there remain ambiguities and interweavings Rainaldi seeks to deal with. Jahan Maka's 'just paintings', as he called them, betray on the other hand various signs of not just creative 'naïveté', but can point to a swirling psychological domain unarticulated but for an at times quirky disturbingness perhaps connected to the hardness and disruption his life pattern would suggest.

Rainaldi's pages devoted to outsider art in the vast provinces of, firstly, Ontario and then Québec, provide for an even wider discussion and demonstration of her subject. Once again, the artists featured often defy category and thus enter a world of 'outsidership' that of necessity blurs, becomes more and more elastic if a willingness to go beyond earlier restrictions is entertained. Two Ontario artists, J.P. Danys and Alma Rumball, reveal the broad range of work outsider art may be deemed to embrace in Canada today. Danys became a painter of the punk scene he was part of in Ottawa whilst energetically and more or less furtively sculpting a large number of life-size female figures put together with found elements, papier mâché and charity shop clothing, emotionally destroying almost all this testimony to a divided sexual identity he had long lived. Rumball became a recluse, creating remarkably complex and beautiful pen and pencil coloured drawings she deemed

physically guided and intensely reflective of her visions and spiritual turn. Other Ontario art explored centres on Jordan McLachlan's painted clay creations of animals, she herself living the fantasy of being a mountain lion cub, obsessively sculpting and 'seeing' various worlds both delicate and terrifying in their implications; and Menno Krant's work quite understandably draws attention for that 'self-determination and self-actualisation' Rainaldi sees emblematically in his strange and powerful representation of the anxieties and other 'raw emotions' he observes in so many people's faces, now staring back out at us as we tussle with their untitled portrayals, thousands of which cover the walls of his home.

The outsider art of Québec receives very particular and focussed attention, touching upon the work of some ten or so artists, from the 'whimsical' and 'nostalgic' paintings of Edouard Jasmin's late retirement to Arthur Villeneuve's *art naïf* and spiritually inspired depictions of intimately known places and especially his utterly lovely decorating of the entire outside and inside of his house with such work, down to Sylvain Martel's life-long passion for the 'visceral', the utterly indescribable '*terrain miné*' of his and/or our floating dis/incarnatedness. Karine Labrie has produced since childhood large numbers of ink on paper works on a daily basis, arguably, being humiliated when young for her deafness, as a means by which to connect to a world somehow shutting her away. Her work is very finely drawn, scarring the paper yet delicately powerful in its offering of female figures dressed and accessoried in the most intricate of manners. Daniel Erban's art bears all the marks of outsidership in its unrefined, blunt and stark mode, this echoing his sensitivity to the marginalised of his world, yet he himself would seem to have been 'gregarious and outspoken' despite his compulsive working through the night, producing many, many pieces. Nancy Ogilvie's art equally is pursued undeviatingly and from a childhood that knew depression, for, though working to survive, she can paint for twenty hours at a time, eschewing socialising, centring herself via her swirling depictions of both outer realities and inner realms of being, as in her bewildering *Cerveau de la hanche*.

Linda Rainaldi's long journey ends with a rather short discussion of the work of Cape Breton's A. J. Aucoin and the today widely known folk art of Nova Scotia's Maud Lewis. If the fine work of John Devlin is not taken up here, it is because, as we have seen, it was featured in the earlier pages of the book where the complexity of its foundation was carefully presented. Aucoin's art removes itself from what we may deem conventional mainstream art in its use of cheap materials, the collapsing into a single unit of painting and framing, what Aucoin called its deliberate and provocative 'flawedness', though all appears to be rationally filtered, without any of the stresses that so frequently underpin the art of the 'outsider'. Maud Lewis' work, focussed upon her limited view of the world, her application of it to the very house she inhabited, is also placed in the context of what is now known of the abuse and hardship she suffered and which no doubt urged the compensatory emergence and development of what museums now might term her *oeuvre*. Finally the book closes with a brief but important analysis of the place of indigenous art, stressing the reservations as to the pertinency of western classification and presenting both the example of an artist such as Annie Pootoogook whose inevitably subjective gaze rests upon the 'social life of her community'; the work of Shuvina Ashoona where 'inner worlds', fantastic yet elegant, meet contemporary western life and Inuit mythology; and the art of carver-painter Floyd Kuptana where Toronto's turbulent street life somehow dances with memories of ancient rites and myths of his Cape Parry past, his alert creativity yet defying the labels we would perhaps wish to pin upon it.

Linda Rainaldi has offered us a fine and balanced study of a wide array of Canada's artists whose work hovers in various ways about the concepts and practices associated with

what we now call outsider art as the years have passed and Dubuffet's foundational notions have slowly mutated and found new pliancy, new perspectives via which we may embrace them. It is a book I urge all libraries to hold.

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